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No. II

LANCASTER AND YORK

1399 to 1485

BY

HARLES LETHBRIDGE KINGSFORD, M.A.

EDITOR OF 'CHRONICLES OF LONDON,' ETC.



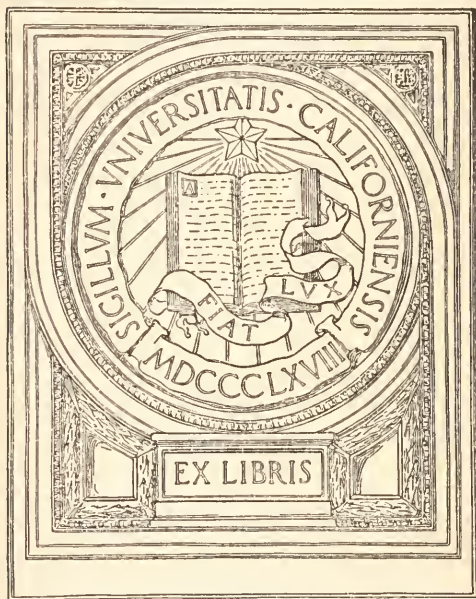
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IN CONTEMPORARY POETRY



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LANCASTER AND YORK

THE fifteenth century has both drawbacks and advantages for the illustration of English history by contemporary English verse. There is a singular dearth of good poetry, and the best of it is not narrative. Hoccleve and Lydgate, it is true, claimed Chaucer for their master, and were prolific in industry. Still, though Lydgate wrote some good lines, they wore their mantle ill. Other rhymesters there were, like John Hardyng, who gave us history in verse, but hardly ever rose to true poetry. On the other hand, such an age, when literature is struggling to take shape, and the national consciousness is awakening, is peculiarly favourable for the ballad-maker. At such a time the popular historian must almost of necessity take verse for his form. When, moreover, great national achievements are common, ballads will be good and true. Victory, again, does not stir national feeling more deeply than does disaster, and when ideas are crude it is in doggerel verse that satire will find vent. Thus, if the fifteenth century can give us no good historical poetry, it gives us some spirited ballads and some pungent satire. We do not need to classify our material. It is all simple, stamped with its own character, and telling its own tale. We may take it in order as it comes.¹

At the beginning of the century the warfare on the Scottish Border was the best theme for the ballad-maker. But there is no poem on Homildon, or any minor incident (legendary or otherwise) to take place with the later ballads of Otterburn and

¹ In my quotations I have so far as possible modernised the spelling. In a few instances I have ventured, for the sake of simplicity, to alter a word.

Chevy Chace.¹ Hardyng gives us but a poor substitute in his rhymes on the exploits of the Umfravilles. It is only as a specimen that the tale of how Sir Robert earned his name of Robin Mendmarket deserves quotation :²

“ At Peebles long afore that time four yere
 He burnt the town upon their market day,
 And met their cloth with spears and bowës sere,
 By his bidding without any nay :
 Wherefore the Scots, from thence forthward ay,
 Called him Robin Mendmarket in certain,
 For his measures were so large and plain.”

Of the Welsh war no English poems have survived, though we know from Adam of Usk³ that “the wonderful deeds of Edmund Mortimer were told at the feast in song.” We must be content with some of the bad verse which Hoccleve wrote to ingratiate himself with Henry of Monmouth. It was not, however, the conqueror of Wales, but the enemy of heresy who attracted him, and it is not a pleasant story which he tells of the scene at the execution in 1410 of the poor Lollard, John Badby, “who would not blin of the stinking error that he was in.”⁴ Hoccleve is more at home when he satirises extravagance in dress :⁵

“ Some time afore men myghten lordes know
 By their array from other folk : but now
 A man shall study and musen a long throw
 Which is which : O lordes, it sit to yow
 Amende this, for it is for your prowé,
 If twixt you and your men no difference
 Be in array, less is your reverence.

* * * * *

In dayes old, when small apparaille
 Sufficed unto high estate or mean,
 Was great household well stuffed of victaille ;
 But now households be full slender and lean ;
 For all the good, that men may reap or glean,
 Wasted is in outrageous array,
 So that householdës men not holdë may.”

However, we get something of use for political history at the end of the same poem, where Hoccleve sketches the aims of

¹ These ballads date from the sixteenth century.

² *Chronicle*, p. 366.

³ *Chronicon*, p. 77.

⁴ *Regiment of Princes*, p. 12.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 17, 19.

English policy in France.¹ The two countries, he says, ought to be one in heart. He was "stuffed with woe" to see the mischief caused by foreign war and civil discord. Purchase peace by way of marriage; and let him, that right heir is, cease all strife. Then might the two realms make war upon the unbelievers, and bring them into the faith of Christ:

"That were a meritorye warring;
That is the way unto the conquering
Of heaven's bliss."

This long passage does not lend itself to quotation; but it matters the less, since the plan was not original. Hoccleve himself admits that he took it from the *Revelations* of St. Bridget. Moreover, the whole idea was in the air, and is the epitome of the policy of Henry V., who at the end of his reign appealed to the Princes of Germany for support in his French war on account of "the good and profit that might arise if there were peace and rest amongst Christian princes, for then might they together intend against Miscreants."²

On Henry's accession to the throne Hoccleve set up for a court poet, and versified on the King's Speech at his accession and his worthy act in giving honourable burial to Richard II.³ Of more interest is the poem to Oldcastle, in which he exhorts the Lollard leader to remember his old past and abandon his heresy. It concludes with an appeal:⁴

"Repent thee and with him make accord!
Conquer merit, and honour let see,
Look how our Christian prince, our liege lord,
With many a lord and knight beyond the sea,
Labours in arms, and thou hidest thee!
And durst not come and show thy visage!
O, fie! for shame how can a knight be
Out of the honour of this royal voyage.
"Some time was no knightly turn nowhere,
Nor no manhood showed in no wise,
But Oldcastle would, his thanks, be there.
How hath the cursed fiend changed thy guise!
Flee from him! and all his works despise!
And that done, unto our Christian King
Thee hie as fast, as that thou canst devise,
And humble thee eke to him for any thing."

¹ *Regiment of Princes*, pp. 191-196.

³ *Minor Poems*, i., pp. 39-40, 47-49.

² *Foedera*, x., p. 162.

⁴ *Ibid.*, i., p. 24.

Hoccleve's poem was clearly written in 1415 at the time of Scrope's plot, in which there was some reason to suppose that Oldcastle was implicated. It is chiefly argumentative against the Lollard leader's heresy. An anonymous poem of slightly earlier date is not only much superior in form, but gives us a good orthodox opinion on the abortive Lollard rising at London in January, 1414.¹ We see therein how the movement was regarded by contemporaries as a political revolution under the guise of a religious reformation. The author, no doubt, disliked it equally in both its aspects.

- "It is unkindly for a knight
 That should a kinges castle keep,
 To babble the Bible day and night
 In resting time when he should sleep :
 And carefully away to creep,
 Fore all the chief of chivalry.
 Well ought him to wail and weep,
 That such lust hath in Lollardy.
- "I trow there is no knight alive
 That would have done so open a shame ;
 For that craft to study or strive,
 It is not a gentleman's game ;
 But if he lust to have a name
 Of pelour² under hypocrisy ;
 And that were a foul defame
 To have such lose³ of Lollardy.
- "And under colour of such lolling
 To shape sudden insurrection
 Against our liege lord king
 With false imagination.
 And for that cursed conclusion,
 By doom of knighthood and clergy,
 Now turneth to confusion
 The sorry sect of Lollardy."

The events of the scrambling and unquiet time of Henry IV. had not been very favourable for the production of national poetry. But the glorious campaign of 1415 brought an outburst of verse, which, if sometimes rude, was always genuine. We are told that when Henry V. made his triumphal entry into London after Agincourt, he would not suffer any songs to

¹ Wright, *Political Poems*, ii., pp. 243-247. Rolles Series.

² Robber.

³ Repute.

be written in his praise.¹ But they were written, nevertheless, and the echo of them survives in the popular English Chronicle or *Brut*, which tells gleefully how Henry at Harfleur "cast down both tower and town, and there he played at tennis with his hard gunstones." "When they should play, they songen welaway! and alas that ever any such tennis-balls were made."² There is an unmistakable ring of poetry here, and the story of the tennis-balls sent by the Dauphin and of the King's vengeance was no doubt a favourite theme with the ballad-mongers. The *Brut* seems to preserve traces of a ballad which differed from, and was perhaps older than, the long poem on Agincourt, which is attributed to Lydgate.³ Of this poem we possess two somewhat different versions.⁴ The older, though the ruder, is perhaps the better. It is in three parts, of which the first deals with the siege of Harfleur. Henry set his guns, "Good Grace," "London," "Messenger," and "The King's Daughter" before the town:

"Every great gun that there was
In her mouth, she had a stone."

So they played their tennis:

"Then said Good Grace, 'than
Have I do, Fellows, go we to game.'
Amongst the houses the balles ran
And made many a Frenchman lame.
'Fifteen before,' then said London, 'in fame.'
His ball full fair he gan throw
Against the steeple of stone rowe;
The belles they rung up a row.
'Thirty is mine,' said Messenger,
'I will it win if that I may.'
The wall, that was y-made full sure
He brake it down, the sooth to say.
The King's Daughter said: 'Hark how they play!
Help me my maidens at this tide!
Five and forty, that is no nay.'"

¹ Pseudo-Elmham, *Vita Henrici Quinti*, p. 72.

² *Brut*, p. 376, ed. Bric. Early English Text Society.

³ But probably incorrectly.

⁴ The older is printed in an Appendix to the *Vita Henrici Quinti*, which Hearne erroneously attributed to Elmham; the second in Nicolas, *London Chronicle*, pp. 216-233.

When the garrison were at last forced to surrender for lack of succour, since the French lords feared a meeting in the field with "the King of England, fierce as a lion," Henry took possession of Harfleur, and prepared for his march to Agincourt.

" 'Sirs,' he said, 'so God me speed
To Calais ward I think to pass.' "

So he rode forth, "sparing neither dale nor down," whilst the French gathered their army in boastful confidence :

" 'We shall go play them at dice,
These lords of England every one,'
Their gentlemen said ; 'by sweet St. John,
Their archers be sold full fair plenty
And all the best bowmen each one,
All for a blank of our money.' "

Then the King "battailed him full royally," and after granting the Duke of York his boon that he should fight in the front ward, addressed his men thus :

" Our King said : ' Fellows ! what time of day ?'
' Sire !' they said, ' it is near prime.'
' Go we anon to this jorney.
By the grace of God, it is good time.
For all the saints, that lie in shrine,
The religious of England all benign,
Ora pro nobis for us they sing.'

* * * * *
' Christ,' said the King, ' as I am Thy knight,
This day me save for England's sake,
And let never that good Realm for me be fright,
Nor me alive this day be take.' "

So the little English army trumped up full merrily, and made the Frenchmen fast to bleed. All acquitted themselves well, for our English soldiers were fierce to fight as any lion :

" The French men, for all their pride,
They fell down all at a flight."

But no man won more renown than Henry himself :

" Our gracious King all men might know,
That day he fought with his own hand,
He spared neither high nor low,
There was no man his dint might stand ;

There was never no king yet in this land,
 That ever did better in a day,
 Therefore all England may sing one song,
 'Laus Deo!' we may well say."

The older version of this poem ends with Agincourt. But in the later version a third part is added descriptive of the King's home-coming, and of the splendid pageant and rejoicing with which he was received at London. In this the ballad-maker appears to have followed the official programme of the festivity, which Henry's chaplain, Thomas Elmham, gave at length in his Latin *Life*;¹ it also appears more briefly in the English Chronicle.² One verse the ballad-maker seems to have added of his own :

"The lords of France, they gan say then,
 England is nought as we ween,
 It fareth by these Englishmen,
 As it doth by a swarm of been;³
 England is like an hive within,
 Their fleers⁴ maketh us full evil to wring,
 Those be their arrows sharp and keen,
 Through our harness they do us sting."

Of the songs which were sung at the triumphal return from Agincourt, one has been preserved together with the music.⁵

"Deo gratias Anglia redde pro victoria!
 Our King went forth to Normandy,
 With grace and might of chivalry:
 There God for him wrought marvellously,
 Wherefore England may call and cry—
 Deo gratias, etc.

"He set a siege the sooth for to say
 To Harfleur town with royal array:
 That town he won and made a fray
 That France shall rue to Domesday.

"Then forsooth that knight comely
 In Agincourt field he wrought manly:
 Through grace of God most mighty
 He had both the field and the victory.

¹ *Gesta Henrici Quinti*, pp. 60-68. English Historical Society.

² *Brut*, pp. 380, 558.

³ Bees.

⁴ Mocks, either of word or gesture.

⁵ Nicolas, *Battle of Agincourt*, Appendix, pp. 67, 68.

“ Now gracious God he save our King,
 His people and all his well-willing :
 Give him good life and good ending,
 That we with mirth may safely sing,
 Deo gratias Anglia redde pro victoria !”

This song was probably the work of an official poet. But a more popular note is struck in the fine ballad of which a fragment is preserved in one of the London Chronicles:¹

“ Steedes there stumbled in that stound,²
 That stood sterc³ stuffed under steel :
 With groaning great they fell to ground,
 Their sides feathered⁴ when they gone fele.
 Our lord the King, he fought right wele,
 Sharply on them his spear he spent,
 Many one sick he made that sele,⁵
 Through might of God omnipotent.

“ Lords of name an hundred and mo
 Bitterly that bargain bought :
 Two thousand coat-armours also
 After their sorrow thither they sought.
 Ten thousand Frenchmen to death were brought,
 Of whom never none away went :
 All their names soothly know I nought.
 Have mercy on them, Christ omnipotent !”

We can hardly doubt that this ballad, which has been preserved by an accident, was only one of many which were inspired by so great a theme. The most popular are likely to have been rude in form, and to have passed orally from mouth to mouth. Some echo of such ballads may survive in a composition of the late sixteenth century, which describes how King Henry sent his trusty page to demand the tribute that was due to him from France. The page brings back a scornful reply from the French King:⁶

“ ‘ He says you’re young and tender of years,
 Not fit to come into his degré,
 But he will send you three tennis-balls,
 That with them you may learn to play.’

¹ *Chronicles of London*, pp. 120-122.

² Time.

³ Stark.

⁴ *I.e.*, pierced with arrows up to the feather.

⁵ Season.

⁶ Child, *English and Scotch Ballads*, vi. 323.

“ Oh then bespoke our noble King,
 A solemn vow then vowed he :
 ‘ I’ll promise him such tennis-balls,
 As in French lands he never did see.

“ ‘ Go call up Cheshire and Lancashire,
 And Derby hills, that are so free :
 Not a married man, nor a widow’s son,
 For the widow’s cry shall not go with me.’ ”

So the King sails to France, “ with trumpets and drums so merrily.” Ten thousand French are slain, and the rest forced to flee. The English march to Paris gates, and the French King thereon agrees to pay his tribute, and to give to England the fairest flower in his land (*i.e.*, his daughter).

Another ballad of the sixteenth century in praise of the English archers at Agincourt is so famous and spirited that room must be found for one verse :¹

“ Agincourt ! Agincourt !
 Know ye not Agincourt ?
 English of every sort,
 High men and low men
 Fought that day wondrous well,
 As our old stories tell ;
 Thanks to our bowmen.”

It was natural enough that the episode of the tennis-balls, and the victory of Agincourt, should figure most in the ballads that survived. The later achievements of the war, if more solid, were less dramatic. In spite of the marvellous swiftness with which Henry conquered Northern France, “ winning daily towns, castles and fortresses,” there was perhaps no single episode so striking as to be fixed permanently in popular memory. A contemporary versifier did, however, compose a narrative of the long siege of Rouen, which is full of graphic detail, and furnishes far the best account which we possess.² The writer was one John Page, of whom we know no more than that at the siege with the King he lay. From internal evidence it is clear that he wrote almost immediately after the events which he describes. Page opens his poem with a commendation to his readers of the tale which he has to tell :

¹ *Bishop Percy's Folio MS.*, ii., pp. 595-597.

² Gairdner, *Collections of a London Citizen*, pp. 1-46.

“ A more solemn siege was never set,
Since Jerusalem and Troy was get.”

Then the history begins with how the Duke of Exeter was sent “to see the ground that was about that city round.” By a cursed deed the French destroyed all their suburbs and ruined many fair churches. Page proceeds to describe how well Rouen was ordained for the war, and how strongly it was fortified. From this he goes on to give the position of the English commanders, starting with the King, who lodged at the Charterhouse, to the south :

“ Of all worship he is a well ;
His honour no tongue may tell.
Of all princes for to account,
Set him principal in the frount.”

When the siege was fully set, a great chain was stretched across the river, and a bridge of boats built to keep the two divisions of the English army in touch. Presently the Earl of Warwick came from the siege of Domfront, and soon afterwards Humphrey of Gloucester arrived from Cherbourg :

“ At the Port Saint Hilary
Full manfully lodged he.
In cast of stone, in shot of quarell,¹
He dreaded him for no peril,
But won worship with his werre,²
And lay his enemies full nerre,³
Than any man that there was,
By forty roods and more in space.”

After he has thus described the English host, Page turns to tell the names of the French commanders and the greatness of the garrison :

“ Of people it was a proudë score,
A king to lay a siege before.

*

*

*

*

*

It was great liking them to lead,
To counter them it was great dread ;
For the fence of them nought at all,
For much of the dread came from the wall ;
For shot of gun and quarell both.

¹ The shot of a cross-bow.

² War.

³ Nearer.

Saw I never greater wothe.¹
 Ever as they issued out and made a fray,
 There would be shot I dare well say
 A hundred guns at walls and towers
 Within the mount of two half-hours."

The besieged held their city bravely, hoping that the Duke of Burgundy would come to the rescue. But the English pressed them hard, and when it drew towards Christmas,

"Meat and drink and other vitayle
 In that city began to fail."

The store of bread was nearly gone, and the starving people were forced to eat dogs, cats, rats, and mice. Even such food was at famine prices: a dog cost ten shillings, a rat half-a-crown, and a mouse sixpence.

"Then to die they did begin,
 All that rich city within.
 They died faster every day
 Than men might them in erthē lay.
 There as was pride in ray before
 Then was it put in sorrow full sore.
 There as was meat, drink and song,
 Then was sorrow and hunger strong.
 * * * * *
 Yet on the walls they made it stout
 For we should not wit without."

When famine came to such a pitch the garrison expelled thousands of useless mouths from the city. Henry would not allow them to pass through his lines, so the poor wretches were forced to starve and perish of cold beneath the walls. But on the Christmas feast he declared that all should have meat and drink enough at his cost:

"'Almighty God,' they saiden then,
 'Of tender hearts be English men.
 Lo! here our excellent King,
 That we have been so long withstanding,
 Of us now hath more compassion
 Than hath our own nation.'"

At last, on New Year's Eve, the captains of Rouen sent in despair to treat. It was in vain that they called for answer at

¹ Injury.

every gate, till they came to the Barbican, where Gilbert Umfraville was in charge. When the French heard his name, they thanked God for that the old blood of Normandy should help them to a good end. Umfraville promised them his assistance, and in the morning brought the news to the King, who willingly consented to receive the citizens next day. Umfraville delivered Henry's answer, and gave the French good counsel :

“ Think with heart before your tongue
 Lest your words be all too long.
 Speak words but little and well them set
 With that prince when ye be met ;
 For one word wrong and out of ward
 Might cause you all to fare full hard.”

When the French arrived at the royal quarters Henry was hearing Mass, and they had to wait till he came out. With stateful cheer the King bade them speak all their will. They began with an appeal for the poor folk beneath the walls. Page describes the scene with manifest knowledge, and gives us a vivid glimpse of Henry's personality :

“ All still he stood that while,
 Neither did he laugh nor smile,
 But with a countenance full clear,
 And with a full lordly cheer,
 Nor too mild, nor yet too strange,
 But in a mien withouten change.
 His countenance did he not abate,
 But still he stood and in estate,
 Or him list to give an answer.”

When the King spoke it was with sharp decision. It was not he who had put the poor folk in the ditch. They themselves had offended by keeping him from the city that was his heritage. To a further request for time to send to the French Princes, Henry answered with a blunt denial :

“ Well they wot I will not go
 Without my right for friend nor foe.
 Since they it long before knew,
 To send them message new and new,
 It were to them no novelty
 To us but superfluity.”

Rouen, he continued, must be surrendered, but he would give them time to treat for conditions. So the French departed deeply impressed :

“ They said : ‘ He is at our avise,
Of all earthly princes the prize,
Taking regard unto his cheer,
And to his countenance so clear ;
To his person and property,
To his features and to his beauty,
And to his deep discretion,
That he hath in possession,
And to his passing princehood,
And to his mickle manhood.
And he is merciful in might,
And asketh nothing but his right.
This virtue is a passing thing
To be within an earthly king.
How should he do but win honour ?
How should he be but a conquerour ? ’ ”

Henry now appointed his representatives to treat with the citizens, and had two pavilions pitched for their accommodation. It was, says Page, a sight of solemnity : the brave array of tents, the citizens gathered on the walls, our own folk without, “ how thick they stood and walked about,” the heralds and pursuivants going to and fro in their coats, the lions of England, the lilies of France, the Portuguese castle :

“ Gaily with gold they were begon,
Right as the sun forsooth it shon.”

Far different was the sight of sorrow and pain where the poor people still lay cold and starving beneath the walls, children begging for bread beside their dead parents, and starving mothers with their dead children in their arms :

“ These were the sights of differance,
That one of joy and that other of penance,
As hell and heaven be parted a to,
That one of well and that other of woe.
There was never a man so strange,
To see that sight, but his heart would change.”

It was long before the parties could come to terms : “ We asked mickle, and they profered small.” But at last the citizens were forced to yield, the keys of the city were brought to the

King, and on 20th January, 1419, Henry made his entry into Rouen.

“ He passèd in without any pride,
 Withouten pipe or clarion's blast;
 Prince, devoutly in he past,
 As a conqueror in his right,
 Thanking in his heart God Almighty.

* * * *

He rode upon a blackē steed,
 Of black damask was his weed,¹
 A paytrelle² of gold full bright
 About his breast it was pight,³
 The pendants did by him down hang
 On either side of his horse strong.
 They that him never erst did see,
 By his cheer well wist it was he.
 So to the minster did he fare,
 And off his horse he lighted there.
 His chapel met with him at the door,
 And went before him on the floor,
 And sung a response full glorious
 ‘*Quis est magnus dominus.*’ ”

John Page's eulogies of Henry V. are not the least interesting passages in his poem. It is perhaps strange that we have nothing else of a like character in strictly contemporary English verse. When some five-and-twenty years afterwards John Hardyng inserted a Lamentation for Henry V. in the first version of his Chronicle, he wrote by way of contrast with the disorder which he then saw all around him :⁴

“ O very Lord ! that art omnipotent,
 What hath England so felly⁵ thee offend,
 This noble prince, peerless of regiment,
 To ravish so from us withouten end ?
 O Lord ! who shall England now defend ?
 Since he is gone that was our high Justice,
 For whom none durst his neighbour then surprise.

“ Above all things he kept the law and peace
 Through all England, that no insurrection,
 Nor no riots then were withouten lese,⁶
 Nor neighbours were in fault of his correction :

¹ Dress.

² Breast-piece.

³ Fixed.

⁴ *English Historical Review*, xxvii. 744-5.

⁵ Cruelly, terribly.

⁶ Letting, remedy.

But peaceably under his protection
Complaints of wrongs always in general
Reformed were so under his yerd¹ equal.

“When he in France daily was conversant
His shadows so oboumbred² all England
That peace and law were kept continuant
In his absence full well through all the land :
And else, as I can say and understand
His power had been light to conquer France,
Nor other realm that were well less perchance.

“The peace at home and law so well conserved
Were root and head of all his great conquest ;
Which exiled been away and overterved,³
In so far forth that north and south and west
And east also is now full little rest,
But day and night in every shire throughout
With salades⁴ bright and jacks⁵ make great rout.”

Most of the English verse for which the early years of Henry VI. gave occasion was of an official character, composed to order by Lydgate and other Court poets. Such was the piece, *On the English Title to the Crown of France*, which Lydgate composed for the Earl of Warwick in 1423, and two short poems on the coronation of the little King.⁶ They have little interest or value. Lydgate's verses⁷ on the reception of Henry VI. at London in February, 1432, are, however, one of his more creditable productions, and are very interesting as one of the best descriptions of a medieval city pageant. From this point of view the poem is too long and detailed to quote to any advantage. One must therefore here be content with the description of how the citizens went out to meet the King on Blackheath :

“Their clothing was of colour full covenable,⁸
The noble Mayor clad in red velvet,
The Sheriffs, the Aldermen full notable,
In furred cloaks, the colour of scarlet ;
In stately wise when they were met,
Each one well horsed made no delay,
But with their Mayor rode forth on their way.”

¹ Rod.

² Sheltered.

³ Upset.

⁴ Helmets.

⁵ Leather jerkins.

⁶ Wright, *Political Poems*, ii., pp. 131-148.

⁷ *Chronicles of London*, pp 97-116.

⁸ Suitable.

With the magnates of the City went the humbler folk in a full fair livery of white to show their pure intent, but all the several crafts had their own devices of rich embroidery. In the procession also went the foreign merchants, Genoese, Florentines, Venetians, and Easterlings, "clad in their manners." On Blackheath they were all drawn up in two ranks to make "A street between each party like a wall," whilst the most principal rode forward to present an address to the King.

Lydgate ends his poem with three verses in praise of London :

" Be glad, O London ! be glad and make great joy,
City of cities, of noblesse precelling,
In thy beginning called New Troy,
For worthiness thank God of all thing,
Which hast this day received so thy King,
With many a sign and many observance
To increase thy name by new remembrance.

" Such joy was never in the Consistory
Made for the Triumph with all the surpluage,
When Cæsar Julius came home with his victory,
Nor for the conquest of Scipio in Carthage ;
As London made, in every manner age,
Out of France at the home-coming
Into this City of their noble King.

" Of seven things I praise this City,
Of True Meaning, and Faithful Observance,
Of Righteousness, Truth, and Equity,
Of Stableness, ay kept in liegeance,
And for of Virtue thou hast such suffisance,
In this land here and other lands all
The King's Chamber of custom men thee call."

This is but the production of a pedestrian muse, and does not reflect any depth of feeling. But when Philip of Burgundy first of all broke his alliance with England, and then attacked Calais, national pride was both hurt and roused. The Flemings had never been popular in England : even the ballad-maker of Agincourt wrote :

" The false Flemings, God give them care,
They loved us never yet, by the rood ;
For all their false flattering fare
Against our King that day they stood."¹

¹ *Chronicles of London*, p. 122.

Fifteen years of alliance with the Duke of Burgundy did not annul the commercial jealousy with which his Flemish subjects were regarded in England. When Philip himself, after the Conference of Arras, "falsed his oath" (at all events in the opinion of Englishmen of that time), the old hatred seemed to have received new justification :

"Thou Philip, founder of new falsehood,
Disturber of peace, captain of cowardice,
Sower and disturber, reproof of all knighthood,
Which of all Burgoyne, that is so great of price,
Thou clepest thyself duke, when wilt thou rise
And in plain field do muster with thy lance?
See how all knighthood thy war doth despise.
Blame thine own falseness for all thy mischance."¹

The song from which this comes is imperfect. It may have been written in 1435 in despite of Duke Philip, or it may be but the beginning of a long piece to celebrate the discomfiture of the Flemings and Burgundians before Calais in the following year. Philip himself, after the breach with England, did not at first proceed to open war. But circumstances soon forced him to justify himself to his new allies, and no exploit was more natural to be attempted than the expulsion of the English from Calais. Such an undertaking appealed to his Flemish subjects, who would gladly have seen the destruction of the obnoxious Staple of their English commercial rivals in that town. So it was chiefly from Flanders that Philip drew the great army, said to number 30,000, with which he appeared before Calais at the end of June, 1436. Nothing could more have roused the English temper. Edmund Beaufort and the Lord Camoys had already been sent with a large force to support Sir John Ratcliff, who was captain of the town. Now, in response to a fresh appeal from the English Government, a further army of 6,000 men was raised and put under the command of Humphrey of Gloucester. But before Humphrey reached Calais on 2nd August the need was past. The garrison had victoriously repelled every assault. Philip's army of burghers did not like the rough reality of war, and when it was known that English reinforcements were coming, on 29th July

¹ Wright, *Political Poems*, ii., p. 148.

they suddenly broke up their tents and departed privily by night, leaving behind them much of their victual and of their ordnance. "So Duke Philip and the Flemings departed from Calais with great shame, disworship, and loss. Wherefore amongst Englishmen were made many rhymes of the Flemings."¹ Of these poems three have been preserved. The first is a very spirited ballad, given in one copy of the *Brut* or English Chronicle:²

"Remember on that worship ye won the first day,
When the Earl of Mortain came passing with his prey
Before your town of Gravelines, where ye, as men bold,
Came running on him fiercely, as lions of Cotswold,³

"With habergeons⁴ and hounsculles,⁵ and rusty kettle hats,
With long pikes and good dags for to kill the rats,
With messis and meskins,⁶ and eke with side jacks,
Dunto unto the mid leg, of canvas like to sacks;
Stopped all with hempen tow, and that in strangē wise,
Stitched like a mattress, all of the new guise;
Ye layed upon the English so mighty with your hands,
Till of you three hundred lay stretched upon the sands.

* * * * *

"Remember how ye layed siege, with great pride and boast,
To Calais that little town; the number of your host
Was a hundred thousand and fifty, to reckon by the polls,
As it was that same time founden by your rolls;
And yet, for all your great host, early neither late,
Calais was so feared of you, they shut never a gate.

* * * * *

"Remember now, ye Flemings, upon your own shame;
When ye layed siege to Calais, ye were right still to blame,
For more of reputation be Englishmen than ye,
And comen of more gentle blood, of old antiquity;
For Flemings come of flemed⁷ men yeshall well understand;
For flemed men and banished men inhabit first your land."

Another much longer piece describes the whole siege in detail.⁸ In July, the time of labour to win worship of arms, so there be no treason—

¹ *Brut*, ed. Brie, p. 582.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 582-584.

³ As the Cotswolds were a great wool-growing district, there were probably many at Calais who hailed from thence.

⁴ Sleeveless jackets of mail.

⁵ Some form of armour. The word does not appear in the Oxford Dictionary.

⁶ These words are also obscure.

⁷ To fleme = to banish.

⁸ Wright, *Political Poems*, ii. 151-156.

“The Duke of Burgoyne, of great pride,
Made great assembly in his lands wide,
In Flanders and in Braband
Of his power and in chivalry
Of Burgoyne and in Picardy,
Of Hainault and of Holland.”

With his great host he thought to win Calais, to slay all therein, to make spoil of her merchants, and beat down her walls. So he came with banners displayed, pitched his stately tents in royal rout, and set up his great guns.

“The Earl of Mortain made a dinner
And said: ‘Fellows, be of good cheer,
Of nothing have we no dread;
I trust to God to see that day,
That for all their proud array,
Full low shall they be spread.’

“The porters kept the gates full manly,
The gates stood open continually,
To watch they were not irk;
The true soldiers, both day and night,
Lay on the walls in harness bright,
It was their house and kirk.

“The women, both young and old,
With stones stuffed every scaffold,
They spared not to sweat nor swink;
With boiling cauldrons, both great and small,
If they would assault the wall,
All hot to give them drink.”

Burgesses, merchants, and commons alike were keen in the defence of their town. Though the enemy fired many a gun they hurt nobody; and when they ventured to assault the walls they were soon full fain to their tents to return again. Foremost in the defence on the English side:

“And one there was, an Irish man,
Who on his hobby¹ swiftly ran:
It was a sportful sight,
How his darts he did shake,
And when him list to leave or take,
They had full great despite.

¹ Pony.

“Also a hound, that was hight Go-by,¹
 That longed to the water-bailly,
 Full swiftly would be ren;²
 And every skirmish to travayle
 Man and horse he would assail,
 Full well he could them ken.”

The ballad-maker winds up with a prayer that Calais may cleave to Merry England as long as the world shall stand:

“Little wot the fool,
 Who might choose,
 What harm it were
 Good Calais to loose.”

The third ballad is preserved, like the first, in a copy of the *Brut*, where it is described as made in despite of the Flemings.³ But it is Duke Philip, rather than his subjects, who is the object of the writer's scorn. This ballad ends:

“What hast thou won with all thy business,
 And all thy tents to Calais carried down,
 Thine ordnances, which cost great riches,
 Bastile,⁴ and carts of faggots great foisoun,⁵
 Of thy guns the dreadful noise and soun?⁶
 Peyse⁷ all together, with many another sign,
 Thy cowardly flight, cockney of a champioun,
 Which durst not fight, and canst so well maligne.”⁸

The defence of Calais was the last exploit of the war which brought the English arms much but shame. Henceforward it was anger rather than pride which was to stir the popular poet to write. The fruits of misgovernment both abroad and at home, and the misdeeds of unpopular ministers, are the themes which we are now to encounter. The ill-keeping of the seas and the consequent injury to commerce was one of the first and most obvious consequences of the weakness of the English administration during the minority of Henry VI. This subject inspired a long poem called *The Libel of English Policy*,⁹ which, from internal evidence, seems to have been written immediately after the defence of Calais at the end of 1436.

¹ The original has “that did high go by”; but the previous ballad gives the clue by reading “Go-by the water-bailif's dog.”

² Run.

³ *Brut*, pp. 600, 601.

⁴ Siege-castle.

⁵ Plenty.

⁶ Sound.

⁷ Weigh.

⁸ Slander.

⁹ Wright, *Political Poems*, ii., pp. 157-205.

The true process of English policy, says the writer, is to foster trade, and maintain a navy,

“So that we be masters of the narrow sea.”

It was his conception of the importance of this policy that had made the Emperor Sigismund call Calais and Dover the two eyes of the English realm. The recent peril had, no doubt, brought it home to many besides the writer, and called attention to the dangerous weakness of the English navy, in scorn whereof the Flemings were wont to say that it would be better to put a sheep than a ship on English money.

“For four things our noble showeth to me,
King, ship, and sword, and power of the sea.
Where be our ships? where be our swords become?
Our enemies bid for the ship set a sheep.
Alas our rule halteth, it is benome.”¹

With this the writer turns to review the commercial position. There was a rich trade between Spain and Flanders; if only the seas were well kept England would have control of it, the more so since English wool was indispensable to both parties. Portugal was an old ally of England, and as for the Bretons, they

“Are the greatest rovers, and the greatest thieves,
That have been on the sea for many a year;
That our merchants have bought full dear,
For they have taken notable goods of ours
On this side the sea, those false coloured pillours,²
Called of St. Malo, and eke elsewhere,
Which to their duke none obeisance will bear.”

But Portuguese friends would not resent it if the sea were better kept, and against the Bretons it were needful. As for Scotland, if only the English held command at sea, the Scots would, for the sake of their trade (though it was but in rude ware), be forced to keep peace. The Easterlings again had to trade for many things with Flanders, and for salt to the Bay of Biscay:

“Thus if they would not with us friendly be,
We might lightly stop them on the sea.”

The Genoese, with their great carracks, would similarly be

¹ Taken away.

² Robbers.

forced into friendship with an England that held the sea. Other Italians moved the writer to indignation for a different reason :

“The great gallies of Venice and Florence
Be well laden with things of complacence,
All spicery and grocers ware,
With sweet wines, all manner of chaffare,¹
Apes, and japes and marmosets tailed,
Niffles² and trifles, that little have availed.

* * * * *

Thus these gallies for this liking³ ware
And eating stuff, bear hence our best chaffare,
Cloth, wool, and tin.”

The writer thought the traffic a bad one; but to him it seemed an even greater evil that the Italians had got control of the machinery of mercantile exchange, and carried away English gold

“Over the sea into Flanders again,
And thus they live in Flanders sooth to sayne,
And in London, with such chevisance,⁴
That men call usury, to our loss and hindrance.”

It was a further grievance that foreign merchants had greater freedom in England than had English merchants abroad. The gallies ought to be compelled to unload and load again within forty days, and the merchants should be required

“To go to host, as we there with them do.”

This was an old device to compel foreign merchants to transact their business through their English “host,” and so to retain control in native hands. Legislation on these lines was re-enacted a few years later, in 1439, but “not performed, to the great hindring of the merchants of England.”⁵ The writer of the *Libel* insists on the need for such protection by legislation, and for a strong navy in the interest of our own merchants :

¹ Merchandise.

² Trash.

³ Pleasant, luxurious.

⁴ Bargaining.

⁵ *Chronicles of London*, pp. 146, 147, 153; *Rolls of Parliament*, v. 31.

“ If they be rich, then in prosperity
Shall be our land, lords and community.
And in worship now think I on the sun
Of merchandy, Richard of Whittington,
That lode-star and chief-chosen flower ;
What hath by him our England of honour ?
And what profit hath been of his richesse ?
And yet lasteth daily in worthiness,
That pen and paper may not me suffice
Him to describe, so high he was of price ;
Above merchants to set him one of the best,
I can no more, but God have him in rest.”

This reference to the most famous of English medieval merchants is interesting, because it stands almost alone. The bare facts of Whittington's life are to be found only in records ; but here we see that his fame rested on his actual achievement, and that it was not merely due to the posthumous reputation which he earned through his munificent charities. The reference to Whittington is, however, incidental only for the purposes of illustrating the greatness and importance of English trade, without the help whereof the marts of Flanders would be feeble and as naught. The whole argument has thus far been intended to show that :

“ If well the sea were kept in governance,
They should by sea have no deliverance,
We should them stop and we should them destroy,
As prisoners we should them bring to noy ;
And so we should of our cruel enemies
Make our friends for fear of merchandise ;
If they were not suffered for to pass
Into Flanders : but we be frail as glass,
And also brittle, not tough, never abiding ;
But when grace shineth, soon are we sliding.”

Much of the first part of the *Libel* was no doubt inspired by the peculiar keenness of commercial jealousy for the Flemings at the time of writing. But the author shows a sound appreciation of the advantageous position of England for the control of trade. Before proceeding to his final conclusion he reviews with equal good sense affairs within the British Isles. He is emphatic on the importance, commercial and political, of Ireland :

“ Remember, with all your might take heed
 To keep Ireland that it be not lost :
 For it is a buttress and a post
 Under England, and Wales another.”

If only the money spent on the French war were diverted to this purpose, England

“ Might win Ireland to a final conquest
 In one sole year, to set us all in rest.”

The prolongation of the French war, he perceived, could bring no profit, but

“ Hath done us harm, and doth us every day,
 And musters made that shame it is to say ;
 Our money spent all to little avail ;
 And our enemies so greatly do prevail,
 That what harm may fall and overthwart,
 I may hardly write more for sore of heart.”

Finally, he dwells once more on the importance of Calais, and illustrates the policy of good sea-keeping by the history of Edgar and of Edward III. :

“ And if I should conclude all by the King
 Henry the Fifth, what was his purposing,
 When at Hampton he made the great dromons,¹
 Which passed other great ships of all the commons,
 The *Trinity*, the *Grace-Dieu*, the *Holy-Ghost*,
 With other more, which as now be lost ?
 What hope ye was the King's great intent
 Of those ships, and what in mind he meant ?
 It was not else but that he cast to be
 Lord round about environ of the sea.

* * * * *

Of sea-keeping, intending victory,
 No better was prince of strenuity :
 And if he had to this time lived here
 He had been prince named without a peer ;
 For doubt it not, but that he would have be,
 Lord and master about the round sea,
 And kept it sure, to stop our enemies hence,
 And won us good, and wisely brought it thence.

* * * * *

Keep then the sea about in special,
 Which of England is the round wall :

¹ Large ships of war.

As though England were likened to a city,
 And the wall environ were the sea.
 Keep then the sea, that is the wall of England,
 And then is England kept by Goddes sonde.”¹

The author was assuredly right in his appreciation of the maintenance of the command of the sea as an essential part not only of Henry V.'s war strategy, but also of his wider policy. It is a mistake to regard that King's French war as one of idle conquest. The writer of the *Libel* showed a better understanding of its true aims when he realized that the war had come to be a blunder, than did the feeble Government which persisted in its continuance.

If the French war had developed into a disastrous foreign policy it had equally unfortunate results at home. The disorganization and disorder which marked the latter part of the reign of Henry VI. were its direct consequences. Of the state of England at that time we have no better picture than the one given by John Hardyng in the first version of his *Chronicle*, which he began soon after 1440, and finished in 1457. Hardyng was exhorting Henry VI. to set his realm in order, and put forward as a model his own old master, Sir Robert Umfraville. The description which he gives of Umfraville as a true knight is so charming that one cannot forbear from quotation :²

“ Though my body here be a simple wight
 Abiding at the will omnipotent,
 My heart shall be with him both day and night
 To pray for him with all my whole intent.
 A better lord, I trow, God never yet sent
 Into the North of all good sapience,
 Nor so helply with knightly diligence.

“ No contekour³ he was in his country,
 Nor never drew sword nor knife to Englishman,
 No rioter, nor never made assembly
 Against neighbour that any man tell can.
 The common folk he helped, and never over ran ;
 A true Justice of peace in his country,
 He was always without partiality.

¹ Sending.

² *English Historical Review*, xxvii. 746-9.

³ Quarreller.

“ With covetise¹ he was never yet infected,
 Nor key of lock kept never in his possession
 Jewels nor gold, so was he whole protected
 With gentle heart by his discretion.
 Common profit without oppression
 Was his labour and all his diligence
 In peace and war with whole benevolence.

“ His servant would he not rebuke nor chide,
 But softly say to him in privy
 All his default, and as his priest it hide :
 And when they stole his goods that he did see,
 He would it lain² from his other meyné,³
 And not reprove him more in any wise.
 So was he kind withouten covetise.”

There was never, says Hardyng, a braver and wiser knight ; above all things, both in war and in peace, he loved the common profit, the pursuit whereof he held to be a King's first duty. King Henry ought to take example from Umfraville, put down the widespread disorder, and see that his laws were duly kept.

“ In every shire with jacks and salades clean
 Misrule doth rise and maketh neighbours war :
 The weaker goes beneath, as oft is seen,
 The mightiest his quarell will prefer,
 The poor man's cause is put on back full far ;
 Which, if both peace and law were well conserved,
 Might be amend, and thanks of God deserved.

“ They kill your men alway by one and one,
 And who say ought he shall be beat doubtless ;
 For in your realm Justice of peace be none
 That dare ought now the contekours oppress ;
 Such sickness now hath take them and access,
 They will nought wit of riot and debate,
 So common is it now in each estate.

“ But this I dread full sore withouten gab,⁴
 Of such riots shall rise amore mischief,
 And through the sores unhealed will breed a scab
 So great that may not be restrained in brief :
 Wherefore, good lord, if ye will give me leave,
 I would say this unto your excellence,
 Withstand the first misrule and violence.

¹ Greed.

² Conceal.

³ Company.

⁴ Jest, idle talk.

“Withstand, good lord, beginning of debate,
And chastise well also the rioters,
That in each shire be now consociate
Against your peace, and all their maintenours;¹
For truly else will fall the fairest flours²
Of your crown and your noble monarchy,
Which God defend and keep through his mercy.”

The King should refuse to listen to any man of whatsoever estate who petitioned him on behalf of an evildoer. The practice of maintenance was the subversion of all law, which ought to fit every man's case, like a Welshman's hose, “to each man's leg that shapen is and meet.” He should remember that those of his ancestors who had kept the peace and law had left the most glorious memory; but those who kept neither,

“Went soon away in many divers wise,
Withouten thank of God at their decease.”

This very outspoken language is the more remarkable because it is contained in a passage specially addressed to Henry VI., to whom Hardyng presented the first version of his Chronicle as a means whereby to attract attention to his own supposed services. It is impossible to discount it as in any degree due to political bias, and it must be accepted as a candid description of the rampant disorder and misgovernment which precipitated the downfall of the House of Lancaster. Nowhere do we get a clearer statement of the widespread evil of private war; nor better evidence of the common practice of maintenance, which made the result of a lawsuit depend more upon the influence that could be brought to bear upon the judge than upon the justice of the case. It is a summary of the social disorder revealed in the *Paston Letters* and other private correspondence of the time. It was a litigious age, but one in which forcible entry and disseisin by violence had almost the position of legal processes. In a memorandum of John Paston's it is recorded that the Prior of Westacre had been compelled by oppression and extortion to give Sir Thomas Tuddenham a fee of forty shillings a year; “but of these and many more it were great folly to labour in as for any indictment, but if ye be right

¹ Maintainers.

² Flowers.

sure of the sheriff's office."¹ Letters to judges appealing for favour to one party in a suit are common, though courtesy might require the addition "so far as conscience permits." It was an old complaint that Justices of the Peace were appointed who would maintain the quarrels of their patrons. A contemporary satirist² lamented that the world was upside down :

" Now maintainers be made Justice
 And lewd men rule the law of kind ;
 Noble men be holden wise,
 For now the bysom³ leads the blind.
 Truth is set at little price,
 Worship from us long hath been slaw,⁴
 Robbers now rule righteousness.

* * * * *

Now brocage is made officers,
 And barratour⁵ is made baily.

* * * * *

He is loved that well can lie ;
 And thieves true men hong.⁶
 To God I rede⁷ that we cry,
 That this life last not long."

The *Libel of English Policy* has shown the weakness of England in the face of foreign foes, and Hardyng's verses have given us a broad view of the troubles at home. From minor sources we can derive more particular illustrations of the progress of popular feeling which led up to the Wars of the Roses. Lydgate composed some verses about 1444 on the blessings of peace,⁸ which are more likely to have been written as a defence of the Government than as a reflection of popular opinion. At all events it was the disastrous ending of the English rule in France, not the unwise desire to maintain it, which stirred national feeling to its depths. It was upon the King's ministers, and above all, upon the Duke of Suffolk, who had negotiated the marriage with Margaret of Anjou, and the cession of Maine, that the storm broke. Some twenty years later the English chronicler⁹ writes: "What loss, because of this marriage, hath the realm of England had, by losing of

¹ *Paston Letters*, ii. 215.

² Wright, *Political Poems*, ii. 235, 236.

⁴ Slain. ⁵ A vexatious litigant.

⁶ Hang.

³ Blind man.

⁷ Counsel.

⁸ Wright, *Political Poems*, ii., pp. 209-220.

⁹ *Brut.*, p. 512.

Normandy and Guienne, by division of the realm; by the rebelling of commons against their princes and lords! What division amongst the lords! What murder and slaying of them! What fields fought and made!" This was no doubt a judgment after the event, but Suffolk's policy was from the first unpopular. Some rude verses, written about 1449, lament the loss of the nation's good rulers, and throw the blame on Suffolk and his colleagues:

"The Rote¹ is dead, the Swan² is gone,
 The fiery Cresset³ hath lost his sight;
 Therefore England may make great moan,
 Were not the help of God almight.
 The Castle⁴ is won where care began,
 The Portcullis⁵ is laid adown,
 Lost we have our velvet hat,⁶
 That covered us from many storms brown.
 The White Lion⁷ is laid to sleep
 Through the envy of the Ape-Clog;⁸
 And he is bounden that our door should keep,
 That is Talbot⁹ our good Dog.
 The Cornish Chough¹⁰ oft with his train
 Hath made our Eagle¹¹ blind.

* * * * *
 The Falcon¹² fleeth and hath no rest,
 Till he wit where to big his nest."

The two last lines are remarkable as an early indication that opinion was beginning to turn towards Richard of York. Suffolk himself is only charged openly with the loss of Talbot, who had been given as a hostage to the French after the surrender of Rouen. Other charges are more freely ex-

¹ The various persons are indicated by their badges, the explanations being written between the lines. "The Rote," or wheel, is John, Duke of Bedford (d. 1435).

² Humphrey of Gloucester (d. 1441).

³ John Holland, Duke of Exeter (d. 1447).

⁴ Rouen, lost in 1449.

⁵ Edmund Beaufort, Duke of Somerset, recalled from France in 1449.

⁶ Cardinal Beaufort (d. 1447).

⁷ John Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk, a supporter of Richard of York.

⁸ William de la Pole, Duke of Suffolk.

⁹ John Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury, given as a hostage to the French.

¹⁰ John Trevilian, the unpopular minister.

¹¹ Henry VI.

¹² Richard, Duke of York, at this time in official exile as Lieutenant of Ireland.

pressed in some satirical verses on William Booth,¹ then Bishop of Lichfield, Chancellor to Queen Margaret, and a prominent person in the court party, who owed his advancement to Suffolk.² The writer charges Booth with having obtained his see by simony, and reminds him how Rome fell to ruin after her rulers began to increase in wealth, and justice was no longer equally executed :

“ But the great and the golded they made but a jape,
And leapt over law at their own lust.”

England was come to the same pass. Judgment and justice were waning ; it was pity to hear the complaints of the people against those who served silver and left the law out.

“ God keep our King—ay, and guide him by grace,
Save him from Suffolks and from his foes all ;
The Pole is so parlous men for to pass,
That few can escape it of the bank riall.
But set under sugar he showeth them gall ;
Witness of Humphrey, Henry, and John,³
Which late were alive and now be they gone.”

This poem was clearly written whilst Suffolk was still in power, either in 1448, or possibly as late as the end of 1449. It seems to hint vaguely that Suffolk has been false to the Princes of the Lancastrian house. In some other verses composed immediately after his arrest in the spring of 1450 he is more openly charged with the death of Humphrey of Gloucester.⁴

“ Now is the Fox driven to hole : hoo to him ! hoo ! hoo !
For if he creep out, he will you all undo.
Some of you hold with the Fox, and run with the hare ;
But he that tied Talbot our dog, evil may he fare !
For now we miss the black dog with the wide mouth ;
For he would have run well at the Fox of the south.”⁵

* * * * *
Now is time of Lent, the Fox is in the Tower ;⁶
Therefore send him Salisbury⁷ to be his confessor.
* * * * *

¹ Wright, *Political Poems*, ii. 225-229.

² *Ibid.*, ii. 232.

³ Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, Henry Beaufort, and John, Duke of Huntingdon, who all died in 1447.

⁴ Wright, *Political Poems*, ii. 224, 225.

⁵ This sort of pun on Suffolk (South folk) is common.

⁶ Suffolk was sent to the Tower on 28th January, 1450, and removed to Westminster on 9th March.

⁷ Probably meaning Ayscough, the unpopular Bishop of Salisbury.

This Fox at Bury slew our great gander ;¹
 Therefore at Tyburn² many men on him wonder.
 Jack Napes, with his clog,³
 Hath tied Talbot our gentle dog.
 Wherefore Beaumont,⁴ that gentle ratch⁵
 Hath brought Jack Napes in an evil catch."

These lines must have been written in February, 1450, whilst Suffolk was in the Tower. On 17th March he was sentenced to banishment from 1st May. On the appointed day he sailed from Ipswich, but was intercepted in the Channel by a ship called *The Nicholas of the Tower*, and executed by one of the sailors. A popular verse-maker celebrated the event with savage glee :⁶

" In the month of May, when grass groweth green,
 Fragrant in her flowers with sweet savour,
 Jack Napes would on the sea a mariner to been,
 With his clog and his chain, to seek more treasure.
 Such a pain pricked him, he asked a confessor.
 Nicholas⁷ said: ' I am ready thy confessor to be.'
 He was holden so that he passed not that hour.
 For Jack Napes' soul, *Placebo*⁸ and *Dirige*."⁹

All Suffolk's supporters and friends were bidden to come and take part in his exequies.

" John Say readeth : '*Manus tuae fecerunt me.*'
 '*Libera me,*' singeth Trevilian,¹⁰ ' ware the rear,
 That they do no more so ' : '*requiescant in pace,*'
 Thus prays all England far and near.
 Where is Somerset ?¹¹ Why appears he not here ?

¹ This refers to the allegation that Suffolk was responsible for the death of Humphrey of Gloucester at Bury St. Edmunds in February, 1447.

² Alluding to the scene at Tyburn on 14th July, 1447, when, after Gloucester's adherents had been hanged and cut down alive, Suffolk produced their pardons.

³ An ape's clog was the Suffolk badge.

⁴ John, Lord Beaumont, who as Constable arrested Suffolk.

⁵ A hound.

⁶ Wright, *Political Poems*, ii. 232-234.

⁷ *The Nicholas of the Tower*.

⁸ The funeral antiphon.

⁹ "*Dirige gressus meos*"—the hymn in the funeral service.

¹⁰ The punishment of John Say and John Trevilian was demanded in Cade's Rebellion, and in 1451 they were indicted by the Commons.

¹¹ Edward Beaufort, Duke of Somerset.

To sing *Dies irae et miseriae* ?
 God grant England all in fere¹
 For these traitors to sing *Placebo* and *Dirige*."

Whilst there was so much bitterness of feeling against the King's ministers, Henry VI. himself seems so far to have been held guiltless, or at the most to be blameworthy for not having sooner dismissed the evil advisers who, as Abbot Whethamstede alleged,² had led him into unwise courses and wasteful expenditure.

"Truth³ and poor men be oppressed,
 And mischief is nothing redressed ;
 The King knoweth not all.
 Throughout all England,
 On those that holden the false bond
 Vengeance will cry and call.

"So poor a King was never seen,
 Nor richer lords all bedene.
 The commons may no more.
 The lord Say biddeth hold them down,
 That worthy dastard of renown ;
 He teacheth a false lore.

"Beware, King Henry, how thou doos !
 Let no longer thy traitors go loose.
 They will never be true.
 The traitors are sworn all together,
 To hold fast as they were brother :
 Let them drink as they have brew."

The majority of these satirical verses on the unpopular ministers are preserved in a single collection. This chance has, perhaps, given an undue prominence to the events of 1450 in the poetical literature of the time. Civil war is no doubt not a very encouraging subject ; but on the other hand, when political feeling runs high it most naturally finds expression in squibs and lampoons. The posting up of bills and doggerel verse was, we know, not uncommon. When, however, they had served their purpose, they were soon forgotten. It is not therefore surprising that few specimens have survived. Those which there are deal chiefly with the corruption of the Government and the prevalence of disorder.⁴ One such piece which

¹ In company.

² *Registrum*, i. 248, 249 Rolls Series.

³ Wright, *Political Poems*, ii. 229-231.

⁴ *Ibid.*, ii. 238-242, 251-253.

cannot be later than 1456 has already been quoted.¹ Another short specimen will be sufficient.²

“Now is England all in fight ;
 Much people of conscience light ;
 Many knights, and little of might ;
 Many laws, and little right ;
 Many acts of Parliament,
 And few kept with true intent.”

Though the exact date when these lines were written is uncertain, there is no time to which they would better apply than the latter part of the reign of Henry VI. From this world of warfare and wrong, of much law-making and law-breaking, it was no wonder that men turned joyfully to the prospect of peace when the two parties professed to be reconciled in 1458.³

“At Paul’s in London, with great renown
 On our Lady day in Lent this peace was wrought ;
 The King, the Queen, with lords many one,
 To worship that virgin as they ought,
 Went in a procession and spared right nought,
 In sight of all the community,
 In token that love was in heart and thought.
 Rejoice, England, in concord and unity.”

The writer of these lines was a Londoner, who ends by praising his city for three things : good faith for the King, love for the commonalty, and its own good rule. There was still no doubt a Lancastrian party in the capital. A stronger note is struck in another poem of the same year, which takes the form of an allegory on the Ship of State.⁴

“Steer well the good ship, God be our guide,
 * * * * *
 This noble ship made of good tree,
 Our sovereign lord King Henry :
 God guide him in adversity,
 Where that he go or ride.”

All the Lancastrian lords and leaders are likened in turn to the parts of the Ship :

¹ See p. 32 above.

³ *Ibid.*, ii. 254-256.

² Wright, *Political Poems*, ii. 252.

⁴ *Archæologia*, xxix. 326-330.

"There is a noble top-mast on height
 The ship to defend in all his right,
 With his foemen when he shall fight
 They dare not him abide.

"The Earl of Shrewsbury is the top's name,
 He keepeth the ship from harm and blame.
 The Earl of Wiltshire one of the same
 That keepeth the ship from dread."

The peace of 1458 proved but a hollow truce. Within a twelvemonth a brawl at Westminster drove Warwick from the court. Even before that Queen Margaret was endeavouring to recover the control of the Government. At the close of 1459 open war broke out again. For once the Lancastrian cause had a complete triumph. Richard of York fled to Ireland, whilst his son Edward, with the Earls of Salisbury and Warwick, took refuge at Calais. At Calais the Yorkist lords began to prepare for their revenge. In the summer of 1460 they opened communications with their friends in Kent, and when they knew the true hearts of the people they determined to cross over to England. Not long before their coming a ballad was set up on the gates of the city of Canterbury.¹ The author took for his text the words of Isaiah,² "The whole head is sick and the whole heart faint." England, which should be the kingdom of God, had become the kingdom of Satan, for the sons of wickedness had brought it to distress. It was written: "Every kingdom divided against itself shall be desolate," and this was the plight of England.

"Harry, our sovereign and most Christian King,
 His true blood hath flemed³ both by sword and exile:
 What prince by this rule may have long enduring,
 That also in most poverty hath been long while?
 The beasts that this wrought to midsummer have but a mile—
 But ever mourneth England for them that be hence,
 With languishing of heart rehearsing my style,
 '*Omne caput languidum, et omne cor mærens.*'"

"Send home, most gracious Lord Jesu most benign,
 Send home thy true blood unto his proper vein,
 Richard, Duke of York, Job thy servant insign,
 Whom Satan not ceaseth to set at care and disdain:

¹ *Davies Chronicle*, pp. 91-94. Camden Society, 1856.

² Isa. i. 5.

³ Banished

But by Thee preserved he may not be slain ;
 Set him, *ut sedeat in principibus*, as he did before,
 And so to our new song, Lord, thine ears incline,
Gloria, laus, et honor Tibi sit Rex Christe Redemptor !

“ Edward, Earl of March, whose fame the earth shall spread,
 Richard, Earl of Salisbury, named prudence ;
 With that noble knight and flower of manhood,
 Richard, Earl of Warwick, shield of our defence,
 Also little Fauconberge, a knight of great reverence :
 Jesu, them restore to their honour as they had before,
 And ever shall we sing to Thy High Excellence,
Gloria, laus, et honor Tibi sit Rex Christe Redemptor !”

Of course this ballad is the work of a violent partisan, who shows his extreme bias by hinting that Henry's son was a false heir born in false wedlock, a venomous slander which Warwick fostered. Probably the posting of the ballad at Canterbury was concerted by the Yorkist leaders. In another piece of the same date, which is of London origin, the writer describes how, as he walked down Cheapside, he saw a woman working letters on a vestment ; he proceeds to expound them :¹

“ Y for York, that is manly and mightful,
 That by grace of God's just revelation
 Reigning by rules reasonable and rightful,
 The which for our sakes hath suffered vexation.

“ W for Warwick, good with shield and other defence,
 The boldest under banner in battle to abide,
 For the right of England he doth his diligence,
 Both by land and water God be his guide.”

The Yorkist lords entered London on 2nd July, and the Earls of March and Warwick almost at once went northward, leaving Salisbury to hold the capital. On 10th July March and Warwick were victorious at Northampton. A Yorkist poet celebrated the event in the usual allegorical strain.² The Bearward (bear-keeper : Edward, Earl of March) and the Bear (Warwick) went to chase the Dogs (the Earl of Shrewsbury and the Lords Beaumont and Egremont), and the Buck (the Duke of Buckingham) ; they bring their foes to bay :

¹ *Archæologia*, xxix. 330-334.

² *Ibid.*, xxix. 334-340.

“ The Bearward asked no question why,
 But on the Dogs he set full round;
 The Bear made the Dogs to cry,
 And with his paws cast them to ground.
 The game was done in a little stound;¹
 The Buck was slain and borne away.
 Against the Bear their was no hound,
 But he might sport and take his play.

The Bear and Bearward save the Hunt (King Henry), and beg him not to take their act unkindly :

“ Stand up, Bearward, welcome be ye,
 Grammercy of your gentle game;
 From you and your Bear I never will flee:
 Tell me now what is your name.
 ‘ Edward of March, I am the same.’ ”

The Hunt then says that the Buck and the Dogs had brought him into distress : “ I followed after, I wist not why.” Thereon the Hunt is brought full reverently to London, over which the Eagle (Salisbury) had hovered watchfully. The poem ends with a prayer :

“ Now God, that madest both night and day,
 Bring home the Master of this Game,
 The Duke of York, for him we pray,
 That noble prince, Richard by name.”

These last lines show that the poem was written before York came back from Ireland in October. The recognition of York in the following month as Protector and heir to the throne seemed to confirm his triumph. But a Yorkist poet warned his leaders not to be too trustful; for those who now spoke fair were as false as ever :²

“ They say in their assembly, it is a wonder thing
 To see the Rose in winter so fresh for to spring;
 And many barked at Bear, that now be full still,
 Yet they will him worry, if they might have their will.”

The foreboding was justified by the defeat and death of Duke Richard towards the close of the year. London was, however, now firmly Yorkist, and even after their victory at St. Albans (17th February, 1461—Shrove Tuesday) the Lancastrians did

¹ Space of time.

² *Archæologia*, xxix. 340-342.

not venture to enter the capital. None the less, the citizens were in terror for the threatened excesses of the Northerners. It was with heartfelt relief that they welcomed Edward of March on 26th February, saying : ¹

“ He that had London forsake,
They would no more to them take.”

Edward was acknowledged as King, and after a short interval pursued the retreating Lancastrians northwards, to win his crowning victory on Palm Sunday, 29th March, at Towton.

“ ² Now is the Rose of Rouen ³ grown to a great honour,
Therefore sing we everyone blessed be that flower !
Upon a Shrove Tuesday, on a green mead
Betwixt Sandridge and St. Albans many man gan bleed ;
On an Ash Wednesday we lived in mickle dread :
Then came the Rose of Rouen down to help us in our need.”

“ For to save all England the Rose did his intent,
With Calais and with London, with Essex and with Kent,
And all the South of England to the water of the Trent.
And when he saw the time best the Rose from London went.”

With the Rose went the Ragged Staff (Warwick), the Lion (the Duke of Norfolk), and many others.

“ The Northern party made them strong with spear and with shield ;
On a Palm Sunday after noon they met us in the field,
Within an hour they were right fain to flee and eke to yield ;
Seven and twenty thousand the Rose killed in the field.
Blessed be the time that ever God spread that flower.” ⁴

In a piece which was probably composed a year or two later the whole situation is reviewed from the point of view of the successful party. ⁵ The dethroning of Richard II., whose reign was “ abundant, with plenty of wealth and earthly joy,” was a great wrong. Henry of Derby won the crown by force and perjury, and by the judgment of God was smitten with leprosy. Henry V., though he reigned unrightfully, was the best of his line, and upheld the honour of England. Henry of Windsor by great folly brought all into langour.

¹ *Gregory's Chronicle*, p. 215.

² *Archæologia*, xxix. 343-347.

³ Edward IV. was born at Rouen.

⁴ This line comes as a refrain at the end of each verse.

⁵ Wright, *Political Poems*, ii. 267-270.

“ Calling to mind the false engendred treason
 And mischief that were in his days reigning :
 The good Duke of Gloucester, in the season
 Of the Parliament of Bury being,
 Was put to death ; and ay since great mourning
 Hath been in England, with many a sharp shower,
 Falsehood, mischief, secret sin upholding,
 Which hath caused in England endless langour.

“ Also scripture saith, woe be to that region
 Where is a King unwise or innocent ;
 Moreover it is right a great abusion,
 A woman of a land to be a regent,
 Queen Margaret I mean, that ever hath meant
 To govern all England with might and power,
 And to destroy the right line was her intent,
 Wherefore she hath a fall, to her great langour.”

The praise of Good Duke Humphrey and the defamation of Margaret of Anjou were a part of the Yorkist stock-in-trade, and endured into Tudor times. But Margaret was no doubt unscrupulous in her defence of her husband and son. Some years earlier one had written of her : “ The Queen is a great and strong laboured woman, for she spareth no pain to sue her things to an intent and conclusion to her power.”¹ The ballad-maker goes on to accuse her of not caring if she brought England to confusion in the pursuit of her ends, and of being willing to secure her power by the help of strangers (this, no doubt, alludes to her intrigue with Pierre de Brezé, the Seneschal of Normandy). Thus all true English people turned to King Edward :

“ A great sign it is that God loveth that knight,
 For all those that would have destroyed him utterly,
 All they are mischiefed and put to flight.
 Then remember his fortune with chivalry,
 Which at Northampton gat the victory,
 And at Mortimer’s Cross he had the honour :
 On Palm Sunday he won the palm of glory,
 And put his enemies to endless langour.

“ Richard, Earl of Warwick, of knighthood
 Lodestar, born of a stock that ever shall be true,
 Having the name of prowess and manhood,
 Hath ay been ready to help and rescue

¹ *Paston Letters*, iii. 75.

King Edward, in his right him to endue :
 The commons thereto were ready every hour ;
 The voice of the people, the voice of Jesu,
 Who keep and preserve him from all langour."

Ten years later the recovery of the throne by Edward IV. was the occasion of another long descriptive poem of no great literary merit.¹ It begins with the coming of the King "out of Dutchland into England over the salt sea." When he reached Holderness the people

"There showed him unkindness and answered him plain,
 As for King he should not land there for weal or woe ;
 Yet landed that gentle Prince, the will of God was so."

Edward's reception in Yorkshire and march to London are described at length. There is a touch of pathos in the story of how he saw his little son for the first time:

"The King comforted the Queen, and other ladies eke ;
 His sweet babes full tenderly he did kiss ;
 The young Prince he beheld, and in his arms did bear.
 Thus his bale turned him to bliss ;
 After sorrow joy, the course of the world is.
 The sight of his babes released part of his woo ;
 Thus the will of God in everything is doo."

From London Edward went out to do battle with Warwick at Barnet :

"There was riding and running ; some cried, ' Welaway !'
 Unknowing to many men who the better had.
 Some sought their masters, some hit them that day ;
 Some ran here and there like men that were mad ;
 Some were right heavy and hard bestad,
 Right busy in their wits away to go.
 All was for the best, our Lord would it should be so."

The Battle of Tewkesbury is passed over, and the writer (clearly a Londoner) turns to describe at length the attempt of the Bastard of Falconbridge to seize the capital :

"Much sorrow and shame the wretches they wrought,
 Fair places they burnt on the water side ;
 Their mischievous deeds availed them nought,
 Shamefully they wrought, and so them betide."

¹ Wright, *Political Poems*, ii. 271-282.

There is little in the poem to reward quotation. The most interesting things are some of the personal references. Of Earl Rivers it is said :

“ He purchased great love of the commons that season.”

Richard of Gloucester is called a noble Prince,

“ Young of age, and victorious in battle,

* * * * *

Fortune hath him chosen and forth with him will go.”

Hastings, the Chamberlain, is praised as one who “ failed his master neither in storm nor stowr.” For the City it was a great honour that the King dubbed seven aldermen knights on the field.

The only other poem of the reign of Edward IV. which we need consider is a commercial tract,¹ somewhat in the spirit of the *Libel of English Policy*, but much shorter and inferior. It has the same argument of the dependence of foreign nations on our English commodities, cloth and wool :

“ Therefore let not our wool be sold for nought,
Neither our cloth, for they must be sought ;
And in especial restrain straitly the wool,
That the commons of this land may work at the full.”

The regard for the workers shown in the last two lines is characteristic of the piece :

“ The poor have the labour, the rich the winning ;
This accordeth nought, it is a heavy parting.”

Therefore, says the writer, care should be taken that the workfolk should be paid in good money. Nor was he concerned only for the wool-workers, but also argues for the better treatment of those who “ mine in the earth, to get their sustenance.”

The short reign of Richard III. was too tragic for the contemporary verse-maker. We have only two famous couplets. On 18th July, 1483, a doggerel rhyme was posted on the doors of St. Paul's Cathedral.²

¹ Wright, *Political Poems*, ii. 282-287.

² Fabyan, p. 672.

"The Cat, the Rat, and Lovel our Dog,
Rule all England under a Hog."

Richard himself, whose cognisance was a boar, is meant by the Hog. The other three are his ministers, Catesby, Ratcliffe, and Francis, Lord Lovel. The author was William Colyngbourne, who was afterwards concerned in Buckingham's rebellion. His share in the rhyme was not discovered till a year later, when for this and other treasons he was executed with exceptional barbarity.

The other couplet,

"Jack of Norfolk, be not too bold,
For Dickon, thy master, is bought and sold,"

is said to have been fixed to the Duke of Norfolk's tent on the eve of the Battle of Bosworth, as a warning that he should no longer trust in King Richard's fortune.¹

After Richard's reign was over there were certain features in it which attracted the ballad-maker. In their present form these ballads belong to the reign of Elizabeth, or even later, but preserve in a greater or less degree older compositions. One which describes how in 1483 the Duke of Buckingham was betrayed by his servant Banister has an edifying moral of how the traitor and all his family came to a bad end, but is not of special interest.²

Of more value are two ballads written by minstrels in the service of the Stanleys. One, which is called *The Rose of England*,³ is put in an allegorical form so similar to that of the ballads of 1460-61, as to justify the belief that at all events it preserved the same literary tradition. England is described as a fair garden, with a beautiful red rose-tree in its midst. The Boar had "rooted this garden up and down," and tore the rose-tree asunder. But a sprig of the Rose (Henry Tudor) was preserved, returned to England with the Blue Boar (the Earl of Oxford), and sent for help to the old Eagle (Lord Stanley). By their aid he wins the victory. The Earl of Oxford is in particular distinguished for his skill in marshalling Henry's army :

¹ Hall, *Chronicle*, p. 419.

² *Bishop Percy's Folio MS.*, ii. 255-259.

³ *Ibid.*, iii. 187-196.

“The Blue Boar the vanward had,
 He was both wary and wise of wit;
 The right hand of them he took
 The sun and wind of them to get.”

This is not the only touch in the ballad which is of historical value. It seems to be probable that the original was composed quite early in the reign of Henry VII. by someone who was well acquainted with the facts.

A much longer poem of the same Stanley cycle is *The Song of the Lady Bessy*, which is of a high degree of literary merit. Various versions of this poem are in existence, due no doubt to the fact that it was handed down orally before it was committed to writing. But from internal evidence it would seem to have been composed originally by one Humphrey Brereton quite early in the sixteenth century. So it was written near enough to the time to be based on actual knowledge, and Brereton himself figures as an actor in the story. “The Lady Bessy” (Elizabeth of York) is troubled by her uncle the King, and appeals for help to Lord Stanley :¹

“It is not three days past and gone
 Since my uncle Richard sent after me
 A bachelor and a bold baron,
 And a doctor of divinity,
 And bade that I should to his chamber gone,
 His love and his leman that I should be.”

Rather than marry with the murderer of her brothers she would be burnt on Tower Hill, and she was resolved to wed no man but the Earl of Richmond. Stanley at first refused, for Richard was his lord. Elizabeth warns him that his own destruction is intended by the King; still Stanley is unmoved, and only gives way when he is at last convinced of the Lady Bessy's distress and sincerity. Together they devise a plot in England, and send Brereton as their messenger to Henry Tudor in Brittany. Brereton finds an English friend, who was porter at Beggrames Abbey, where Henry dwelt :

“‘I shall thee teach,’ said the porter then,
 ‘The Prince of England to know truly;
 See where he shooteth at the butts
 And with him are lordes three.

¹ *Bishop Percy's Folio MS.*, iii. 321-363.

He weareth a gown of velvet black,
 And it is coated above the knee,
 With long visage and pale.
 A wart he hath,' the porter said,
 'A little also above the chin.
 His face is white, the wart is red,
 Thereby you may him ken.'"

Henry sends back word that he will cross the sea for the Lady Bessy. The conspirators then proceed with their plot, but Stanley has to leave his son, Lord Strange, as a hostage in London. When Henry lands the Stanleys join him and march to Bosworth. Strange is in danger of his life, and is only saved by the imminence of Richard's own peril, which compels him to postpone his vengeance. The battle is won by the help of the Stanleys :

"There may no man their strokes abide
 The Stanleys dints they be so strong."

Richard is advised to take horse and flee, but makes answer :

"Give me my battle-axe in my hand,
 And set my crown on my head so high,
 For by Him that made both sun and moon,
 King of England this day I will die."

When Richard's dead body is brought to Leicester the Lady Bessy meets it with bitter revilings :

"How like you the killing of my brethren dear,
 Welcome, gentle uncle, home."

Then Elizabeth is married to Henry, and Sir William Stanley sets the crown on their heads.¹ So the long struggle of Lancaster and York comes to a happy ending.

London plays so great a part in the history of the fifteenth century that we may fitly close with a quotation from the poem which the Scotsman, William Dunbar, wrote in praise of the City in 1501 :²

"Above all rivers thy river hath renown,
 Whose boreal streams pleasant and preclare,
 Under thy lusty walles runneth down,
 Where many a swan doth swim with winges fair,

¹ The conclusion is apocryphal.

² *Chronicles of London*, p. 254.

Where many a barge doth sail and row with air,
 Where many a ship doth rest with top-royal.
 O ! Town of towns, patron and not compare;
 London, thou art the flower of cities all.

“Strong be thy walls that about thee stand,
 Wise be the people that within thee dwells,
 Fresh is thy river with its lusty strand,
 Blith be thy churches, well sounding be thy bells,
 Rich be thy merchants in substance that excels,
 Fair be their wives right lovesome, white and small,
 Clear be thy virgins, lusty under kells¹:
 London, thou art the flower of cities all.”

¹ A net, a covering for the head.

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